

# Addressing Plastic Pollution

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*Greenpeace.* (n.d.).

Plastic pollution is a major environmental problem that affects wildlife, ecosystems, and human health. Hence, this editorial will discuss the need for urgent action to address plastic pollution and suggest ways governments, individuals, and corporations can reduce their plastic consumption and waste.

## **Plastic Pollution**

Plastic pollution is a growing and pervasive issue. The increasing usage of plastic generates substantial amounts of litter, negatively affecting the environment. An estimated 10 million tonnes of plastic pour into the ocean annually, creating an unprecedented environmental crisis (Boucher & Billard, 2019). Plastic pollution is threatening ecosystems, wildlife, human health, and economies. Moreover, microplastics (plastic particles smaller than 5 mm) have

been found in human food, the air, and drinking water, raising concerns about their potential harm to people and animals (Nikkiema & Asiedu, 2021). However, the use of plastic has immense societal benefits as it is inexpensive, lightweight, and versatile. Thus, it is closely integrated with many aspects of people's lives, and its demand will continue to grow in the future (Wagner, 2022). Therefore, the problem will further exacerbate. Current efforts to manage this threat cannot compete with the rising quantities of plastic entering the environment (Prata et al., 2019)

This complicated global challenge cannot be solved easily. Numerous complex factors work against regulating and minimizing the harmful environmental effects of plastic pollution. These include political and economic factors, a lack of commitment by governments and stakeholders in the global plastic economy, divergent views among scientists, and underreported or overlooked polluters (Iroegbu et al., 2021). To address the ecological, social, and economic issues associated with plastic pollution and achieve nearly zero input of plastics into the environment, corporations, governments, individuals, and the international community must make significant commitments toward improving the global plastic system (Lau et al., 2020). In order to prevent an immense build-up of plastic in the environment, coordinated worldwide action is urgently required to decrease plastic consumption, boost recycling, waste collection, and reuse rates, and advance developments in the plastic value chain (Lau et al., 2020).



*CMS.* (2021).

## **Governments**

Governments play a crucial role in addressing plastic pollution. Although many countries have already enacted policies addressing plastic pollution, they are often incomplete and not adequately enforced, undermining global efforts for a sustainable future. Nonetheless, national policy measures are necessary to guarantee a long-lasting solution to control plastic waste and reduce its generation (Nikkiema & Asiedu, 2021). In order to reduce plastic pollution, governments should regulate the production and consumption of plastics harmful to the environment by enforcing bans or restrictions. Although plastic is hardly ever replaced, for safety reasons, in products such as food packaging, complete bans on other single-use plastic are beneficial (Prata et al., 2019). For instance, cotton buds and microbeads used in cosmetics can be substituted by biodegradable materials. Nevertheless, plastic packaging of some products, such as medicine, cannot be banned but improved in design (Prata et al., 2019)

Moreover, an effective policy for managing littering is to incentivize the correct disposal of waste through positive reinforcements such as tax incentives or deposit-refund systems (Prata et al., 2019). Financial incentives can successfully bring change on the ground, as evidenced by instances from several states. However, such policies should be accompanied by strengthening the plastic recycling sector (Nikkiema & Asiedu, 2021).

Furthermore, awareness and education are powerful instruments in tackling plastic pollution. Hence, governments should incorporate plastic education into school curricula to address the challenge and foster sustainability (Iroegbu et al., 2021). Other tools that can bring awareness to the issue are clean-up campaigns, media, and free massive open online courses (Prata et al., 2019). Governments can facilitate the creation of such activities.

## **Corporations**

Moving further, transnational corporations are powerful stakeholders in the fight against plastic pollution and can have an enormous impact on the environment. However, they possess the financial and political capacity to hinder or circumvent coordinated global efforts to tackle plastic pollution. Global brands such as Coca-Cola, Unilever, PepsiCo, and Nestle

are among the highest polluters but rarely take ownership of the environmental threat they pose (Iroegbu et al., 2021). Consumers have typically been held responsible for plastic pollution as the ultimate users of plastic products. Nonetheless, they have limited access to plastic-free alternatives (Cowan et al., 2021). Therefore, companies should strive to use options such as glass, recycled and biodegradable materials. However, these materials are rarely used as they have a much higher cost than plastics. Another possible solution is improving the product design to decrease the amount of used plastic or removing unnecessary packaging (Prata et al., 2019). Many companies have stopped providing (free) plastic bags, resulting in a considerable drop in plastic bag usage (Nikkiema & Asiedu, 2021). Lastly, corporations can incorporate circular economy principles into their operations, designing products with the end of life in mind and promoting reuse and recycling (Nikkiema & Asiedu, 2021).

## **Individuals**

Individuals can also participate in managing plastic pollution and take small but impactful steps to reduce their plastic footprint:

1. **Participate in clean-up activities:** Clean-up campaigns can help reduce plastic pollution on beaches, parks or natural reserves. Moreover, they can serve as awareness tools (Wagner, 2022)
2. **Avoid using single-use plastics:** They can be replaced by reusable bags, straws, bottles, utensils, containers, lids, and mugs, among others.
3. **Recycle:** Individuals can segregate their waste and ensure it is disposed of correctly. Recyclable plastics should be separated from the rest of the waste.
4. **Raise Awareness:** Individuals can also inform others about the dangers of plastic pollution. They can use social media platforms, create awareness campaigns, or have discussions with family and friends to emphasize the significance of reducing plastic usage.

In conclusion, plastic pollution is a severe environmental issue that needs to be urgently addressed by governments, corporations, and individuals. While businesses can invest in

more environmentally friendly production methods and materials, individuals can help reduce their plastic consumption and waste. Governments can enact policies to control the use of plastic and encourage sustainable behaviours. Plastic pollution affects everyone, and immediate action should be taken to fight it.

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